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SUBJECT: PART 1 OF 2: BAGHDAD'S SUNNIS REQUIRE LOCALLY
TAILORED SUPPORT TO FIGHT AL QAEDA

REF: BAGHDAD 1866

Classified By: POLCOUNS ROBERT S. FORD, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: Ameriya Sunni leader Sayf Sa'ad al-Obaidi (Abu Abid) told poloffs July 15 that his neighborhood's fight against Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) continues apace. Abu Abid, who serves as military commander of the group in Baghdad's Ameriya neighborhood that rose against AQI in late May (Reftel), described his plans to rid Ameriya of AQI before taking the fight to AQI and the Shia Arab militia Jaysh Al-Mahdi (JAM) in adjacent neighborhoods. While Sunni Arabs in Ameriya currently seek support from Coalition Forces (CF) to continue fighting Sunni extremists, Sunni Arabs in the adjacent neighborhood of Ghazaliya seek CF support firstly to block Shia extremists' expansion (sectarian cleansing), and secondarily to combat AQI. This cable is the first in a two-part series examining the broader significance for Baghdad of these two local uprisings against Sunni and Shia extremists. END SUMMARY.

AMERIYA'S ANTI-AQI LEADER PLANS TO EXPAND THE FIGHT

¶2. (S) BACKGROUND: The Sunni Arab uprising against AQI in Baghdad's Ameriya neighborhood began in late May (Reftel) under the leadership of Abu Abid and Sheikh Khaled. Abu Abid is a trained sniper who served in the Iraqi Army during the first Gulf War. Sheikh Khaled, the neighborhood's political leader, is the most prominent of the five anti-AQI Sheikhs in Ameriya. Both of these leaders recently survived attempts on their lives: AQI reportedly launched a mortar which struck Sheikh Khaled's mosque, severely injuring his wife; and a violent dispute broke out July 16 between Abu Abid and one of his advisors/deputies, Abu Omar. The EPRT speculated that increasing publicity and media attention may be exacerbating divisions among the Ameriya fighters. The EPRT also reported that the fighting force in Ameriya is small -- estimated between 35 and 100 residents in a neighborhood containing approximately 32,000 men. The group's name has evolved from "Baghdad Patriots" to the "Freedom Fighters" and most recently to "Ameriya Revolutionaries." Poloffs and PRToff conducted the following assessment during a trip July 15 to Forward Operating Base (FOB) Liberty and Combat Outpost (COP) Bushmaster in Ameriya for conversations with the leaders of the Ameriya fighters, with First Infantry Division's Second Brigade Combat Team (2BCT), and with two of 2BCT's seven subordinate battalions, 1-5 Cavalry and 2-12 Cavalry. The EPRT embedded with 2BCT coordinated the visit. END BACKGROUND.

¶3. (S) In a July 15 meeting in Ameriya, Abu Abid described his plans to fight AQI and the Shia Arab militia Jaysh Al-Mahdi (JAM) in adjacent neighborhoods, and his desire to become part of official Iraqi security forces. He noted that he hopes Shia groups will fight JAM just as his Sunni Arab force has fought AQI. "Even if Shia do not fight JAM, I will

continue to fight Al Qaeda," Abu Abid said. He added that he and his followers plan to pursue fleeing AQI members into the adjacent Khadra neighborhood. "Then," he added, "we will go fight Shia militias in Shia areas." (Multi-National Corps Iraq (MNC-I) notes that just because Abu Abid would like to expand the fight into neighboring areas, does not mean that Coalition Forces will allow him to do so.)

¶ 14. (S) According to Abu Abid, AQI has retaliated recently against Sunnis in Ameriya by destroying public services and private businesses. He said that AQI's power in Ameriya has significantly diminished, but the terrorists still employ snipers, mortars and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to murder and intimidate residents. He complained that the Iraqi Army (IA) "bothers me during my work." "Before I came," he bragged, "the Iraqi Army could not dream of fighting Al Qaeda." Although willing to join Iraqi security forces, Abu Abid claimed that he has not yet had official contact with the Government of Iraq (GOI). He requested continued protection for his fighters by Coalition Forces (CF), and better access to food and public services in Ameriya. Abu Abid did not ask for weapons, but he acknowledged the limitations of his fighters: "Without your support," Abu Abid told 1-5 CAV's commander, "what I'm doing now would never succeed."

¶ 15. (S) The EPRT confirmed that the Ameriya Revolutionaries have not yet won the battle against AQI. The group continues to collaborate closely with 1-5 CAV, and recently launched operations to remove AQI from Ameriya sector by sector. They have successfully cleared southern Ameriya and much of the central section. Neighborhood tips also continue to lead to the capture of AQI operatives and weapons caches.

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GHAZALIYA NEIGHBORHOOD: SHIA MILITIAS FIRST, THEN AQI

¶ 16. (S) BACKGROUND: The situation in Ameriya's northern neighbor, Ghazaliya, is more complex. The Ghazaliya neighborhood contains AQI elements in the south, unaffiliated Sunni Arabs in the center, and Shia Arabs in the north. Sunni residents of central Ghazaliya continually endure attacks and death threats from marauding Shia extremists of the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militia situated in northern Ghazaliya and the Shula neighborhood of Kadhamiya district. Southern Ghazaliya, by contrast, does not currently suffer from JAM attacks but does contain AQI members. The EPRT reports that the area has also been significantly depopulated since 2003. The team estimates that people currently occupy only about one quarter of the homes in this area, which formerly housed wealthy members of the ruling Baathist elite, many of whom fled in 2003. It now contains many elderly Sunnis recently displaced from the Kadhamiya district by Shia militias. As southern Ghazaliya comprises few people with local attachments, few young men, and no recognizable leaders, AQI members easily intimidate the area's remaining residents. END BACKGROUND.

¶ 17. (S) Whereas Ameriya's Sunnis approached the Coalition Forces (CF) for support against AQI, the CF commander (2-12 CAV) covering Ghazaliya approached local Sunnis to involve them in their own defense. The 2-12 CAV commander has organized a volunteer formation called the "Ghazaliya Guardians," comprising residents who had asked for help in preventing JAM expansion southward. Vetted members will soon begin work alongside a Shia battalion of the Iraqi Army (IA). Due to the political sensitivities involved in pairing local Sunnis with Shia army units, the 2-12 CAV commander reports that his battalion will not/not authorize this group to attack JAM members; he will require them to remain purely defensive. If the local Sunni fighters can stop Shia militias from encroaching on their territory -- their first concern -- 2-12 reports that they could then turn their

attention to the AQI located in southern Ghazaliya, but likely with less direct involvement in combat operations than that of the Ameriya Revolutionaries, and in closer cooperation with Iraqi Army units.

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